

February 15, 1966

Saigon

Dear Meg,

I got back from India and Hong Kong last week to find your letters, the clipping and check: and, of course, a great load of business accumulated over a month that had to be cleared up.

I take it -- from the coolness of your letter (and the rather biting use of quotes) - that you were irritated by my letter of 3 January, which was written as fast as I could type before catching my plane to India. Let me try to sort things out.

When Adam wrote me that he would like to try to get the notes published, I wrote him a long letter of which I have a carbon saying it was OK with me, if it were anonymous and were cleared officially. I explained the background of the letter, and in answer to his request to see anything similar I might have written, I explained why I hadn't written anything else in terms of sensitivities here:

"I've felt inhibited from writing about the work here, or personalities, even to friends in the business, like you, John (McNaughton), Al or Champ in ISA or Harry (Rowen), because I haven't wanted in any way to get into the position of using a separate channel of communication back to official circles in Washington. That's kept me from writing anything at all, for example, to John; I'd feel stupid not mentioning the work, yet I wouldn't feel free to discuss the problems here, frankly, on my own ... So, this one piece is the closest I've come to sending anything back that borders on business; it's all atmospherics, but even so I hesitated long before suggesting to Harry that it could be seen by anyone in the Pentagon."

Hence the need to get it cleared by my boss here, which I proposed to do after Adam had more of the specifics:

"So, give me some word on where and when, anonymity, the purpose to be served (that, come to think of it, is not obvious to me) and I'll break the thought to my boss."

I went on:

"I must warn you that, although I'm not too sensitive to deletion and abridgement, I am very sensitive indeed about anyone mucking about with my syntax (I'm not speechwriting now), tangled and peculiar as it is. I can be as savage with editors as Albert, which could tell you a good deal.

However, I am open to suggestion, tentatively offered; and if cuts are necessary, as I would suppose, I'd be glad to make them and/or consider suggestions. Send me a clean copy for the purpose, if things get that far (I have only one poor copy)."

Next act: Someone sent me some Xerox copies of the letter, so I used one to edit, delete, and add. At this point John McNaughton came through Saigon, and I took advantage of his 707 going directly back to Washington to hand him the edited copy in an envelope addressed to his principle deputy, Adam. I enclosed a letter mentioning some possible outlets (including The Reporter), but leaving the placement of the piece, terms and clearance, in his hands.

Next: I got your proposal to publish in The Reporter, which pleased me very much, coming from you. You mentioned, "Naturally, nothing would be done without your approval," which, actually, I took for granted. My comment to you-- that Adam was my executor (which referred, in my mind, to arrangements for placing the piece) wasn't expected to modify Adam's understanding of the division of labor, i.e. it wasn't meant as a message to Adam. As I recall, I mentioned to you that I had sent Adam an edited version; I wanted to make sure you got it from him, rather than going ahead with editing on the copy I sent you.

Meanwhile, now having Xerox copies of my notes, I showed them to several members of the team here; but not, as it happens to Lansdale, on the advice of others that he was too busy to bother with it at the moment.

I returned for a couple days before taking leave to India, to find your edited manuscript -- which ignored all the corrections and changes I had sent off by special messenger (Assistant Secretary of Defense, in a Presidential plane) several weeks earlier -- and your letter, implying the thing was already in print and saying, in all innocence "presumably you didn't think it would be necessary to see this prior to publication. Still, I'd like you to have a copy of it ..."

My reaction was, of course: "What the hell?" Irritated and unhappy were definitely euphemisms; I was mad. Not at you, at all -- your comment showed only a misunderstanding of my letter to you, which was vague -- but at Adam, who seemed totally to have ignored both my request for final approval and my suggested editing, neither of which were vague at all.

I didn't mind the editing (I was pleased to see the effort that had been made to edit by deleting rather than by changing: thank you), despite an objection in principle (I'd be amazed if you didn't share it) to being edited without final approval. I felt more strongly about the lost chance to say more about Jerry. And above all (though I didn't mention it, since I thought the piece might not come out for some time even if it was too late to change) I was dismayed at the possibility that

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Lansdale might find a piece about Vietnam coming out of The Reporter by a member of his team, before he had heard anything about it. Which, of course, is what happened. Lansdale was, very naturally, rather jarred when I produced this bit of news last week, when he returned. Fortunately he liked the piece, as did the other members of the team.

This is a long account, but I wanted to give you enough of a picture of the view from this end so you could put yourself in my place. You seemed to be hurt -- or just mad? -- at my lack of appreciation of your editing and overall effort. The simple fact is that I was feeling baffled (that things had somehow worked out this way), angry (at Adam) and frustrated (that I didn't have the last-minute tinkering on my first non-technical publication since the Advocate; and particularly that I was getting in the position of going around my boss, which I had been extremely anxious to avoid). I think you would have felt the same way.

Adam, by the way, sent me a nice note explaining that he had simply taken my comment to you as changing my earlier directions to him. Moreover, he had never received from John my letter or edited copy. (!)

Anyway ... the piece looks good; everyone here likes it (a lot of people have gotten clippings from home); I don't want you to be mad at me. Thank you for everything.

The offer from Bernard Geis Associates is flattering; I'll answer it directly, though of course I'll have to turn it down. I mentioned to Takashi Oka, a friend of the Roses who writes for the Christian Science Monitor, that I proposed to give the money for the piece (which was very generous, by the way) to a secondary school scholarship in Jerry's name. He informed me that Mrs. Rose was at least temporarily strapped for money. She was living in Hong Kong with their two children at the time of Jerry's death, and he didn't leave much insurance (though Air Vietnam may come through eventually). So - doing all my mail this afternoon, at last -- I have sent your check to her. Could you send her some reprints, please? Her address is:

Mrs. Jerry Allen Rose
c/o Mr. Harry Rose
19 Baker Street
Gloversville, New York

And please send me a batch: 50, if possible. (But not if that's going to make you mad, for some reason).

Dan Jacobs wrote me he had figured out the identity of the writer from an abundance of clues: someone who had recently been in the Pentagon, who had children of his own and liked ao-dais ...

India was terrific. But it's good to be home.

Love,

Two months have passed since that letter; I've learned a lot, but I'm not going to pass it along now, because I seem to be on page four. Have you talked to Sy Deitchman or Jim Devine on their return? I was delighted to see Jim sent out here, after a year of trying to persuade John to cut someone in ISA loose long enough for a tour. How about Al, at last, or Champ? John's question--Why?--is, I know, a sophisticated one: i.e., Why pay the high cost of going out to look at landscapes and buildings, to hear briefings, to listen to the same people whose reports we are already reading?

The basic answer is: Because the reporting sent back--both from the field to Saigon, and from Saigon to Washington--is extremely incomplete, inadequate and distorted. That is fact one; fact two is that the very people who write those reports, along with others who aren't in a position to write them, will actually talk much more frankly and fully, in an informal, conversational atmosphere, without their superiors listening in. In short, (pass it on) the purpose of making a reconnaissance out here is ~~not~~ essential not primarily ~~xxxx~~ to lend concreteness to reports you are already getting but to compensate for gross inadequacies and bias in the reporting system. It's true that the higher the figure, the less benefit he will be allowed to get from the trip; he will get mainly briefings (which are not worth leaving Washington for), superiors will always be present, mavericks will be barred from the briefing room or order^{ed} to shut up, and he will, obviously, not see the peculiarly educating sights I saw with John Vann, driving the roads of Hau Nghia with machineguns on our laps. But almost anyone below the level of JTM could break through much of this; maybe even you. It's worth a try, if you're in this area. Otherwise, please lend a push to get others out here. (It could be very good for Champ, for example).

I'm tempted at this point to launch into substance: What I've Learned This Fall; but I'll suppress it again, because, as a matter of fact, I've got a long piece I want to write for the boss tonight (it happens to deal with the relation of police-type intelligence to counterinsurgency; I've gotten very interested in this, by talking to some Britishers and Australians). You will have noticed, in this letter and my notes, that I have burst out from the McNaughton-imposed disciplines concerning written communication (another thing that makes me nervous about writing to John; the tropics have ruined one more McNaughton-trained man).